In service of two masters: a political history of radio in pre-independence Botswana

James Zaffiro

Abstract

This study identifies and critically analyses the major imperial (global and regional) political and economic factors and decisions that influenced and shaped the development of pre-independence radio broadcasting in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. With little or no consideration of the needs of the local population, two duelling imperialist powers – Great Britain and the Union of South Africa – negotiated, disagreed, and eventually virtually co-established a centralised, administrative radio network that reflected their own regional ambitions. Based primarily on key official British Protectorate, High Commission and Union government documents obtained from extensive archival research in the Botswana National Archives, a detailed picture emerges of two duelling imperial powers planning for their own divergent regional futures, via the establishment of administrative and political dimensions of radio policies, for a territory which both wished to control for their own purposes. Once Britain had decided against allowing South Africa's annexation of Bechuanaland, radio politics and policies fell more into line with those in other British colonial African and Asian territories, primarily managing perceived anti-colonial nationalist challenges and deterring the perceived threats posed by apartheid- and Cold War-inspired communist influences.

Keywords: Bechuanaland Protectorate, Botswana, British colonialism, radio, South Africa

Introduction

This study identifies and critically analyses major imperial administrative, political and economic factors and decisions that influenced and shaped the development of

James Zaffiro is professor of Political Science at Central College, Pella, Iowa. zaffiroj@central.edu

critical arts
Routledge Taylor & Francis Group
28 (6) 2014
DOI: 10.1080/02560046.2014.990658
ISSN 0256-0046/Online 1992-6049
pp.958–976

pre-independence radio broadcasting in the Bechuanaland Protectorate (Botswana). It is based primarily on key official British Protectorate, High Commission and South African Union government documents obtained from extensive archival research in the Botswana National Archives (BNA). Two dueling colonial powers – Great Britain and the Union of South Africa – negotiated, disagreed and eventually virtually co-established a centralised (mostly administrative) radio network that reflected their own regional ambitions. Ultimately, both Britain and South Africa sought to shape radio policy in Bechuanaland in support of the divergent political and economic futures which each power hoped to bring about.

The political history of Bechuanaland radio may be seen as the unfolding of an increasingly complex, overlapping series of conflicts of interest between several competing groups, including British colonial authorities in the Bechuanaland Protectorate (who represented the interests of Europeans living in the territory), the British High Commissioner in Cape Town, postal and media authorities in the Union of South Africa, chiefs, and other local authorities in the territory. For the most part, Africans' expressed needs or preferences were viewed as secondary or subversive, or were simply absent from their discussions, proposals and decisions. As was the case in most other British African territories, administrative and security considerations proved to be important factors in the genesis of radio broadcasting in the Bechuanaland Protectorate. Unlike Kenya or Rhodesia, there was no large settler population in the territory clamouring for an entertainment-oriented radio service, nor was there any visible interest in using radio broadcasting to communicate with the African population until the onset of the Second World War.

After the war, once Britain had decided against allowing South Africa to annex Bechuanaland, radio policies slowly fell more into line with those in other British colonial African and Asian territories, primarily as a tool for managing anticipated anti-colonial nationalist challenges and deterring the perceived threats posed by apartheid- and Cold War- inspired fears of communist influence.

Before then, the Union government attempted, in an increasingly blatant fashion, to control radio development in the Protectorate. Their efforts significantly diminished the willingness of British officials to consider petitions for commercial broadcasting stations in all High Commission territories, out of a rising fear of alienating South African leaders, and thus decreasing their willingness to give ground on wider political and economic issues under negotiation.

The actual development of a state-run radio system as a tool for suppressing nascent African nationalism was initiated by Bechuanaland authorities in the late 1950s. At that point, with apartheid in full bloom, with diminished British power in the sub-region and strong nationalist pressures for independence coming to fruition, Commonwealth officials described South Africa's influence over Bechuanaland broadcasting as 'politically indefensible' and asserted that 'control over radio is a

matter in which the High Commissioner ought, in law, to be the master of his own house' (BNA File S.204/14).

Even then, British Colonial Office and High Commission authorities continued to move slowly, and with great caution and even deference to Pretoria, as delicate negotiations ensued over the localisation not only of radio but also posts, telecommunications and currency. Future national leaders were not involved, or even consulted. These negotiations were by no means successfully concluded by independence in late 1966. Indeed, for decades after, these decisions, taken in secret by Bechuanaland's two colonial masters, continue to be reflected in commercial, communication, economic and even political relations with the two countries, surviving as unwelcome remnants of British deference, etched upon Botswana's regional dependency.

Pre-war broadcast development

The principle of British High Commission deference to Union laws and policy regarding radio dates from 1927 (High Commissioners Notice No. 22 of 1927). Radio was in its infancy, British power was great, and imperial relations with South Africa were less conflict-laden. With a more centralised administration and greater British influence in southern Africa, authority over wireless broadcast and receiver licensing had been granted to the Postmaster-General in Pretoria, with the expectation that he would act in the best interests of all three High Commission territories, since it was assumed that they would eventually become part of the Union.

By 1934, Bechuanaland Resident Commissioner, Col. C.F. Rey, had formally stated that Protectorate radio should be based on Union requirements and that it would continue to follow amendments made in the Union (BNA File S.224/5/1). Indeed, it was the Union Postmaster-General in Pretoria who continued to claim authority to issue or deny radio licences to High Commission territory ventures, combined with British colonial deference, which stifled general audience radio development in Botswana until 1962.

A radio communications network was begun at Bechuanaland Protectorate police outposts in selected district offices when in 1934, the Government Secretary at Mafikeng asked the Union Postmaster-General in Pretoria to send a radio engineer to conduct tests in the Protectorate (BNA File 1188/II).

Resident Commissioner Col. Rey soon became personally involved in the campaign to initiate radio, remaining a personal champion for the rest of his tenure at Mafikeng.

Under Rey, wireless became a significant communications network, linking remote areas of Bechuanaland and the British Imperial Reserve at Mafikeng. Wireless stations were established with Colonial Welfare and Development funds at Mafikeng, Maun, Tsabong, Ghanzi and Gaborone in early 1936. From July through

November of 1936, additional sites were added at Kanye, Serowe and Palapye under the direction of a British Broadcasting Corporation (BBC) engineer, a Mr. Grey. On 27 November 1936, Chiefs Tshekedi Khama and Bathoen were afforded an opportunity to broadcast messages from Mafikeng to their people, listening at two 45 watt transceivers in their lands (BNA File 7241/5).

By this time more direct South African involvement had also begun, as the Witwatersrand Native Labor Association obtained British permission to establish stations of their own at Francistown, Kazungula and Mohembo, to assist in mine labour recruitment (BNA File 7241/5).

Early in 1937, Government Engineer, W.J. Brind, was put in charge of the network and announced a new general audience broadcast schedule, including music, for nine hours per week, Monday through Friday and Sunday evenings, Col. Rey proudly sent reception reports to the British High Commissioner in Pretoria from listeners to station ZNB-Mafikeng from as far away as India, Scotland, and even Springfield, Ohio, in America (BNA File S.6748/13).

Rey hoped to convince colonial authorities in Pretoria and London to put more money into system expansion based on administrative savings, pointing out that wireless had saved a heavy bill in motor mileage and largely eliminated the need to send messages by car to isolated centres in the territory (BNA File S.6748). To build local support for wireless, Rey approached the Native Advisory Council, promising to let more chiefs talk to their people over the system from Mafikeng (AAC, Official Record, 4 March 1937). His initial lobbying appears to have been successful, judging from the positive tone of the debate following his speech. The result was that Rey could tell the High Commissioner that local chiefs supported his expansion plans. Very rapidly, however, this good feeling was allowed to erode, as Europeans increasingly took control of wireless policy, to the near total exclusion of Africans in the territory.

A painfully similar pattern with other areas under British indirect rule began to emerge in Bechuanaland during the first half-decade of wireless, whereby the cherished principle, as restated in February 1937 by Lord Harlech, British High Commissioner, that ‘every effort should be made to consult and work with native authorities and act as the power behind the throne and not the throne itself’ (EAC Address, 15 February 1937) was conveniently ignored in cases where the speedy and full approval of local authorities was not forthcoming.

The first instance of this pattern occurred less than a year later, with Chief Tshekedi Khama’s refusal to allow South African Airways (SAA) and the Union government set up a radio station on tribal land (BNA File 6748). Previously, the tribe had signed an agreement with the Protectorate government authorising the site for a police transmitter. Now the Mafikeng authorities were using this agreement to pressure Tshekedi into agreeing to the South African request. Despite persistent refusals,

Mafikeng ultimately ignored the wishes of the tribe and granted permission to SAA, under administrative control of the Union Postmaster-General in Pretoria. This case helped reinforce the precedent of South African involvement in radio matters within Bechuanaland, something which decades later would make the setting up of an independent radio capacity much more difficult.

Meanwhile, the Protectorate government wireless network grew to include more district centres, and more chiefs were expressing an interest in radio. However, expansion came to a screeching halt in 1940, with the onset of war in Europe. Thereafter, the system suffered from an acute shortage of spare parts and frequent equipment failure, due to limited British stocks in connection with the war effort. By 1945, many of the district transceivers had been off the air for four years. Mafikeng and Maun, the two main centres, remained on-air, thanks to United States parts suppliers.

World War II: from police network to broadcast radio

During the war, an increasingly heated debate arose between the Protectorate government, Union government and London, over administrative control of radio in all three of the High Commission territories. South Africa claimed control, arguing that various proclamations by High Commission authorities relating to radio placed control – except for military purposes – under the Union Postmaster-General in Pretoria. The British position, that 'the General Post Office in London is responsible for representing the Territories in these matters', was restated but not enforced (BNA File S.371/2/1).

Pretoria's insistence on a virtual veto for broadcast development in Bechuanaland would grow increasingly vocal with the growth of commercial radio in South Africa and especially with the rise of African nationalism across the continent following the end of the war.

In Bechuanaland, the massive departure of young men to fight with British forces in the Middle East and Europe provided impetus for a more news-oriented radio service, especially from the main ZNB-Mafikeng station. In November, 1941, the British Secretary of State contacted Protectorate and High Commission officials concerning the feasibility of airing a BBC news commentary 'of simple character and in simple English which would be acceptable to the Native population in the Territories'. The reply from Mafikeng was swift and favourable. The Government Secretary at Mafikeng noted that such a commentary would 'be very favorable to counter hostile propaganda and in making people understand the war'. It was suggested that loudspeakers be installed at *kgotla*s (community councils) in the main villages and, further, that they be paid for out of native treasuries (BNA File S.371/2/1).

District commissioners (DCs) and chiefs were asked to communicate their views regarding the installation of radio receivers at *kgotla* sites. Doubts were expressed over the responsibility for running and maintaining equipment. One DC wrote that 'some native treasuries want to buy a set immediately since there are many Africans who understand English well enough to follow the news' (Letter, 5 August 1941). The Resident Commissioner urged his DCs to put the question of radio purchases before the native assemblies. Government Secretary Forsythe-Thompson urged DCs to use their influence to convince the native assemblies to proceed with the purchases (BNA S.6748/23).

Throughout late 1941 reports reached Mafikeng of decisions taken by native assemblies on the radio question. These offer a picture of important regional variations in the perceived feasibility of radio set distribution and audience interest across the Protectorate. From Mochudi, 'the chief says he is very doubtful if enough people at *kgotla*s could understand the news in English to justify putting a set there'; from Gaborone village, 'Bamalete and Batlokwa do not consider purchase of sets justified'; native assemblies at Lobatse, Molepolole, Kanye, Maun and Ngamiland agreed to purchase sets as soon as possible, placing them at *kgotla*s 'for community listening'; Ghanzi rejected purchase on the grounds that 'Africans were too scattered across the district'; and leaders at Serowe noted that 'wireless would benefit only a minority of the tribe and would attract noisy crowds' (BNA File S. 6748/23).

The language question proved to be a more significant issue for potential African listeners in areas where radio sets were put up to air war news. The Ghanzi DC urged Mafikeng to instead 'air an occasional 10-minute Setswana news summary over the ZNB Protectorate radio network, arguing that only a few people gather to hear the news in English' (Letter, 13 July 1942). Doubts persisted in Mafikeng, particularly over the cost of hiring a translator, yet as evidence of interest grew, the idea of translating the Education Department's weekly *War News Letter* was put to its editor, H.J.E. Dumbrell, who suggested that it might be useful to broadcast the Setswana version, to determine if there was sufficient interest to justify regular Setswana-language broadcasts (Savingram, 26 August 1942). The RC gave approval for a trial broadcast over ZNB-Mafikeng in September 1942. Dumbrell suggested that perhaps regular Setswana news broadcasts might become a weekly feature of the ZNB service. Traders in local shops were asked to tune in to the broadcast for their customers and villagers. A schools supervisor, Levi Moumakwa, was recruited to assist in the translation and to read the news (Memorandum, 1 September 1942). Since this was at the height of the war, the project fell under the rubric of 'propaganda work'. The experimental broadcast of war news in Setswana occurred at 08:00am on 1 October 1942.

Excerpts from the English transcript reflect the perceptions of its European authors, particularly as to what aspects of the war would be interesting to Africans,

the necessary degree of 'simplification' in terms of language and concepts, as well as goals of the Allied information effort:

> The Government gives its greetings to chiefs, headmen, and Batswana (sic) tribesmen … Here is some news about the war. In the far north of Africa our army and that of the Germans stand facing and watching each other, and each is ready to make a pounce whenever the opportunity occurs. The British found 30 aircraft and destroyed them ... as one destroys guinea fowl sleeping in a tree … some of the bombs the British are dropping on German factories weigh as much as 40 bags of mealies … to drop them our aircraft had to fly further than from Mafikeng to Bulawayo and back. We continue to receive good news from our men in the African Auxiliary Pioneer Corps. They want their relatives to write them and tell them home news. We are all well in Mafikeng. I hope you liked hearing this message over the air. If you have, it may be possible for the Government to arrange for another one to be given. Pula! Pula!
>
> [Anthem plays]

The reactions of tribal and district authorities were mainly favourable. War news was hungrily sought. In November, it was decided to make the Setswana news a fortnightly feature, to help in 'keeping up the spirits of the people of Bechuanaland and in counteracting dangerous rumors'. By February 1943, Setswana war news broadcasts were made weekly, on Thursdays at 10:00am. Content remained based on Protectorate Censor Dumbrell's *War News Letter*. In June, Resident Commissioner Forsythe-Thompson asked his DCs to provide audience reactions and analysis to these broadcasts. Calls for more Protectorate news and more frequent broadcasts were almost universal in their reports. DC-Tsabong stressed: 'The only way Africans can hear news is by these broadcasts, in the absence of literacy' (BNA File S.6748/23).

The Colonial Secretary in London was advised of the success of the Setswana broadcasts and a 1944 Colonial Office report held up the Bechuanaland experiment as an example for other territories to follow, calling also for the 'application of radio to mass education in Africa following the conclusion of the war' (Great Britain, Colonial Office Report No. 186, par. 13d).

In November, the South African Broadcasting Corporation (SABC) agreed to allow the Protectorate government to use its equipment to boost the signal strength of station ZNB in Mafikeng, initiating what was to become an increasingly problematic relationship over control of the Mafikeng station and broadcasting in Bechuanaland. In December 1944, Protectorate government Schools Inspector, Dingaan Mokaila, one of the pioneers of Botswana broadcasting, became connected with the ZNB operation as translator and broadcaster of the Setswana news bulletins (BNA File S.6748/23).

Even before the end of the war, the Protectorate's administration had been convinced of the long-term value of radio broadcasting in the territory. The

Government Secretary argued that what was needed was 'proper organization of programmes for transmission by trained personnel' (*Note*, 5 January 1945, in BNA S. 6748/23). However, the war news broadcasts had demonstrated that listening at stores and in homes on individually owned radio receivers was far more popular than communal listening at *kgotla*s. Despite preference for private listening, he nevertheless recommended to his superiors in Pretoria and London the 'provision of receiving sets and loudspeakers in public places of all principal villages' (ibid.).

Post-war developments

Formulating policy with respect to the extent, format and intended goals of postwar Bechuanaland broadcasting proved especially difficult, given that the British had not yet made up their minds about the political future of the Protectorate. Administrative control of radio was dependent upon the much more encompassing question of whether the Union government would at some point absorb Bechuanaland. If, on the other hand, eventual independence was envisioned, a different path would have to be followed. Complicating these matters further was the fact that both the British colonial administration and the ZNB facilities remained inside Union territory, at Mafikeng.

Answers to these questions were not forthcoming in 1945. Fifteen more years would pass during which time the nature and goals of broadcasting in the region would undergo radical transformations. In late 1945, the question was more specific: Should weekly Setswana news broadcasts continue on ZNB? With the rapid return of Batswana war veterans it was feared that weekly summaries of world news would 'become remote from the interests of the ordinary Motswana' (A.C. Clarke 1945). For most colonial administrations, when the period of wartime crisis had passed, the perception was that the need for broadcasting to Africans had passed with it.

H.G. Clarke, the new Director of Education, recommended that the weekly Tswana news service be more profitably utilised as a medium of education and entertainment. This was significantly different from what was being recommended for other former wartime broadcast efforts in British Africa. In fact, the continued housing of administrative control of radio within the colonial Education Department, rather than as a separate department or section within Home Affairs or Native Affairs, sets the Bechuanaland experiment apart from similar radio services which targeted African audiences, such as Southern Rhodesia. Instead, Bechuanaland seems to have reflected the thinking of Northern Rhodesia, under the pioneering work of Harry Franklin and A.M. Kittermaster, who also stressed the educational potential of radio in Africa (Franklin 1949).

During the war, broadcast development had been debated within the European Advisory Council (EAC) where little interest was expressed by the settler population in maintaining government general audience broadcasting beyond that time. In

considering the Education Department's proposal to transition to an education and entertainment-based English and Setswana service, the Resident Commissioner instructed Clarke to undertake a comprehensive audience analysis. DCs were instructed to collect information on audience size and attitudes in their areas (BNA File 7421/5/II).

Survey results revealed a relatively small audience consisting mainly of chiefs, government employees, domestic servants, and a small nucleus of European farmers, traders and ranchers scattered throughout the Texas-sized protectorate and a preference among Europeans for English language radio. Was general audience broadcasting – and in particular Setswana language programming – a luxury or unnecessary? Should long-term radio development be scaled back down to an essentially administrative communications network, leaving entertainment and news services to the South Africans, Rhodesia, and the Portuguese?

As these questions were raised, station ZNB was coming under renewed pressure from the Union government, the SABC and the Postmaster-General in Pretoria, each of whom desired a strong hand in determining the future of radio in Bechuanaland. In 1946, the issue of the SAA transmitter on tribal land – a sore point between the Protectorate government and tribal authorities – came up again. Addressing the African Advisory Council (AAC), Chief Tshekedi Khama cited it in accusing the British administration of 'deciding what was best for Africans'. Calling for fuller discussions on wireless policy between government and the inhabitants of the territory, he complained that '[g]overnment has allowed to pass an opportunity for closer cooperation between Africans and themselves; we are getting more and more dissatisfied with the policy of having everything thought and done for us' (AAC, *Official Record*, 27th Session, April–May 1946).

Tshekedi's even broader proposal for the creation of a joint African and European Protectorate Development Committee was quietly ignored until 1948, at which time the Resident Commissioner dismissed it as something 'which would not serve any useful purpose' (AAC, *Official Record*, 29th Session, August 1948). By that time African nationalism was beginning to grow in Bechuanaland, and with it the role of radio broadcasting was coming to be seen by all groups in an entirely new and more politically sensitive light. The year 1948 also marks the beginning of the NP-led grand apartheid regime in South Africa, as well as the deepening of the Cold War.

Despite rapid growth in the number of radio receivers in Bechuanaland throughout the politically-charged 1950s, no clear decisions concerning general audience broadcasting were forthcoming. The government communications network grew as three more district centres were linked to Mafikeng by 1947, and by 1952 the network of out-stations had grown to 18. By the end of the decade, with the decision to grant independence to a sovereign Botswana all but made, there were a total of

43 stations in the government network, including four in Mafikeng, each under the control of a different department (BNA File 1188/II; BNA File 6748/23/II).

Thus, possible independence and radio broadcasting were interconnected in the policy calculations of the British. Once a decision to grant independence had finally been made, it was the perceived political utility of radio broadcasting as a tool for countering African nationalist ideas which would ultimately come to be the deciding factor, not only in terms of government radio's future, but for media and information policy generally. With the creation of a new Government Information Branch in the late 1950s, under the control of a virulent anti-nationalist, anti-Communist Malaya hand, prospects for a popular, education and entertainment-based English and Setswana service receded until the eve of independence in the 1960s. Instead, it was out of a strong desire to promote a favourable image of government and life in the Protectorate, in the face of perceived threats, that Radio Botswana was conceived (Zaffiro 1989).

Roots of South African influence

Not only with respect to media development, Bechuanaland's overall postwar political and economic position was fundamentally a function of the British colonial legacy characterised by decades of economic neglect and a tendency by London first to foster then later to tolerate growing South African regional hegemony. British colonial officials continued, until very late in their occupation, to base policy in the High Commission territories on the premise that each would eventually be absorbed into the Union of South Africa (Halpern 1965; Hyam 1972; Spence 1964).

South African influence over broadcasting in pre-independence Botswana stems partly from its proximity and its own early mass communications infrastructure development, the first and most extensive across the southern African sub-region. Coupled with British indecision and limited resources, successive South African governments were able to use these political, technical and commercial advantages to extend their influence, if not outright control, over radio development (Zaffiro 1987). Even after a decision was taken to proceed with a government radio service in 1962/63, Protectorate and British government officials were forced to engage in several frustrating rounds of tough negotiations with South African authorities.

Coming to power in 1948, the National Party inherited the centralised, statutory structure of the SABC, giving it a powerful tool. Broadcasting progressively came to reflect apartheid policies, with government using the SABC to support and publicise economic, social and political aspects of racial separation and white privilege. Separate development meant that the expansion of broadcasting would progress along racial and ethnic lines (Orlich 1969). Service for blacks was inaugurated with Radio Bantu in 1952. By the early 1960s, Radio Bantu was broadcasting in seven African languages over commercial FM frequencies, including Radio Tswana, beginning in

June 1962. Radio Tswana attracted listeners from across the border in Botswana (De Koning 1981), drawing the concern of British officials and Batswana political leaders alike. There was early consensus among both groups – and articulated by Queens' Commissioner, Peter Fawcus, and future president, Seretse Khama – that the potentially negative social effects of South African broadcasts needed to be countered by an alternative Botswana national service (Fawcus interview, 1989).

Apartheid, Sharpeville, and South Africa's exit from the Commonwealth in 1961 influenced and then strengthened British resolve not to abandon Botswana to South African incorporation and to come out in favour of self-rule. Only after the decision to put Botswana on a fast track toward independence, did information services (including radio) begin to receive serious attention and development resources. Justifications and plans revolved primarily around managing the political transition, specifically by checking the possible ability of nationalist groups to benefit from or use mass media for their own uncertain and possibly anti-British purposes. Until the Protectorate authorities could size up, choose from, and begin working with African nationalist leaders and groups, it would be imperative to keep a tight rein on radio and the press. Government control was assumed; commercial stations and newspapers were to be opposed.

British post-war African broadcast policy

The other major sources of influence on post-independence radio development in Botswana were the BBC and the British government, particularly the newly-created Colonial Office Department of Information and the United Kingdom Information Services, established after the war as part of an overall strategy for managing nationalist pressures, while bringing colonies and possessions to independence on favourable terms for the departing power.

With the establishment of the BBC Empire Service in 1932, with increased use of radio to counter fascist propaganda worldwide, and with the increasing likelihood of war, colonial officials were soon directed to outline plans for the rapid introduction of propaganda branches. Based on this model, wartime radio services sprang up throughout British Africa, in Kenya (Gadsen 1986) and Bechuanaland (with ZNB-Mafikeng).

After the war, alternative models and influences resurfaced. In as early as the 1937 *Plymouth report on broadcasting*, a debate over the shape and pace of extension of broadcasting services in overseas territories had begun. Besides radio for countering propaganda and for entertaining and informing settlers and expatriates, it was felt by some that radio should be developed as an instrument for the socio-economic advancement of indigenous populations. A weighing of the relative merits of establishing government services versus contracting them out to private companies also commenced, and gained momentum in the late 1940s, as issues of

anti-colonial nationalism and independence became more pressing (Armour 1984; Wilkinson 1972; Williams 1951). Despite support for the creation of radio services in the colonies after the war, London seemed to lack the financial will to establish stations, leaving it to local administrations to find ways to pay for development. Between 1946 and 1959, less than 1.5 per cent of Colonial Welfare and Development funds were allocated for broadcasting and information services development within territories under British possession (Kucera 1968).

Competing models of broadcasting

As the BBC model of a semi-public corporation became institutionalised at home, so it gained influence in deliberations concerning overseas broadcast policies in the soon-to-be-independent territories. Throughout southern Africa, the BBC model competed with the South African model of more direct government control through a responsible minister.

The Bechuanaland authorities (British and African) found themselves caught between competing systems. Ultimately, the setting up of a highly centralised, tightly controlled national radio system to serve the needs of the colonial administration proved far more powerful than the BBC model or that of the radio in service of African education, social and economic development model (Weddell 1980). Unlike some other former British colonies which began life at independence with a BBC model before gradually moving toward greater direct government control, Botswana started off with an administrative model similar to the South African model. Radio was housed within the Department of Information and Broadcasting, first under Home Affairs, and later under the Ministry of Presidential Affairs.

London's unwillingness to fund pre-independence radio development also encouraged attempts to pursue the development of commercial radio in Bechuanaland, which in turn led to even more serious difficulties between the two colonial masters in Pretoria and London. The South African authorities looked to control commercial services beyond its territory, for economic as well as political reasons. After the war, commercial advertising was not allowed on SABC stations, and all programme content was strictly controlled by station management, a board of governors, and the Minister of Posts and Telegraphs. This led South African advertisers, eager to tap the booming consumer market via radio spots, to carry their business to foreign stations, such as Lourenco Marques in Mozambique. Some entrepreneurs also approached the Bechuanaland Protectorate to seek permission to set up commercial stations in the territory.

Fears regarding the unregulated proliferation of commercial stations at their doorstep sufficiently alarmed South African authorities that various measures were considered to avert what some perceived as cross-border violations of the regime's sovereign right to determine all broadcast content for all South Africans. The uneasy

administrative situation which existed between the Bechuanaland Protectorate Resident Commissioner in Mafikeng, the British Colonial High Commission government now based in Cape Town, and the South African authorities in Pretoria came to a head in a series of heated confrontations on the subject.

South African petitioners requesting permission from Mafikeng to erect medium- and short-wave commercial radio stations in Bechuanaland had their requests forwarded to the Union Postmaster-General, and from there to the SABC. One such request, by a Mr. Tesselaar, was rejected by Director-General R.S. Caprara, who cited the 1936 *Broadcasting Act* prohibiting the issuance of licences to individuals for commercial purposes, reflecting the view that the SABC considered the act to extend to the High Commission territories (BNA File S.204/14). Periodic reassertions of this position were made by subsequent directors, other SABC officials, and various representatives of the South African government, that foreign commercial radio ventures targeting South African audiences would not be tolerated.

For years, the High Commissioner deferred to this view, on orders from London. This evoked considerable frustration amongst Bechuanaland authorities, who were inclined to allow the setting up of commercial radio in Bechuanaland as a service to residents. One petitioner, a Col. Collins, promised Resident Commissioner Forsythe-Thompson that he would 'spare no expense in providing programmes of the highest quality' and promised that his venture would remain 'entirely non-political in character' (BNA File S.204/14). His request went from Forsythe-Thompson in Mafikeng to the British High Commissioner in Cape Town, who dutifully passed it on to the Union government. Even after Pretoria had rejected the petition, however, Forsythe-Thompson advised Collins that their applications were still under consideration by British authorities and that 'a final decision regarding issuance of licenses for commercial broadcasting would come from the High Commissioner' (ibid.). A standoff was brewing and the British High Commissioner was caught in the middle. The SABC and Union postal authorities made their position clear: 'In view of our complex racial, political and social problems it would be dangerous to allow radio advertising unrestricted liberty' (ibid.).

Forsythe-Thompson continued to press his superiors in the High Commission to support commercial radio, promising that 'no references to politics would be allowed, nor to matters likely to offend religious susceptibilities in South Africa' and that references to obscene matter would not be permitted; 'in other words, there need not be uncontrolled radio advertising' (ibid.). He emphasised that commercial radio would provide a new source of badly-needed revenue, and also that 'commercial programming might be more original and entertaining, cast in a mold different from those of a quasi-state organization (as in the case of BBC and SABC) [which] are inclined to dullness and lack of imagination' (ibid.). Ultimately, he was instructed to issue all petitioners official letters of refusal. The SABC had won this round.

The British authorities were simply not ready for a major fight with the Union government on this subject. Applications for commercial licences continued coming into Bechuanaland, but British support was not forthcoming. Meanwhile, ZNB-Mafikeng became, for all intents and purposes, an SABC affiliate, with programming and management directed from Johannesburg (ibid.).

Apartheid, Cold War and nationalism

As political and social conditions across British colonial Africa changed rapidly during the 1950s, the question of control over broadcasting in Bechuanaland took on heightened significance. Fueled by revulsion to apartheid and faced with the daunting task of managing nascent Botswana nationalism after 1956, the British were no longer willing to defer to South Africa.

In 1957, Mafikeng authorities, led by Government Secretary J.A. Allison, expressed support for Bechuanaland radio in the form of a commercial service run by the Protectorate government, arguing that 'it is really too much to expect that the Territories should preclude themselves from the great profit to be derived by permitting competition with the SABC' (BNA File 6748/23/II). Allison called for the establishment of a commercial radio station in Gaborone and a tax on advertising revenues, as a badly-needed source of development revenue. In the face of continuing High Commission opposition, the resident commissioners of all three territories began to directly lobby the Colonial Office in London in an effort to gain official support for independent broadcasting schemes in their respective territories. These soon found their way back to the High Commission, where the position remained unchanged:

> The Union regards the Territories as part of SABC's audience and would certainly resist any competition. The fact of the matter is there is no future at all for broadcasting in the Territories unless we are prepared to have a major row with the Union Government. It does not seem to us that the value of having our own broadcasting system is great enough to justify the consequences of such a row. (ibid.)

The 1960s, political and broadcasting independence

As late as 1962, broadcasting for Botswana, as well as for Lesotho and Swaziland, was still directly controlled by the SABC and the South African government. The SABC was paying announcers and technicians to broadcast over station ZNB in the Protectorate government enclave at Mafikeng (inside South African territory), with virtually no Setswana programming. Petitions for commercial licences continued to arrive and were regularly refused by Protectorate authorities, who cited 'links with South Africa' in denying requests. So frequent were these requests that a standard

letter of refusal was drawn up, notifying petitioners of 'South African authority'. This was also the case in the other High Commission territories, as the new Resident Commissioner, Peter Fawcus, kept in close touch with his counterparts as well as with Sir John Maud, the new British High Commissioner. As independence negotiations kicked into high gear, they became increasingly vocal in pressing Maud – and London – for a policy change (BNA File H.306).

Gaining sovereign control over radio was a slow, fraught process for Botswana. By 1960, changes had been made in the *Bechuanaland Posts and Telecommunications Law*, sections of which covered the radio licensing authority and the collection of receiver fees. Under the old arrangement, only ten per cent of these fees accrued to the Protectorate government, with the balance going to the SABC. Indeed, it was a perceived need for revenue that moved the British authorities along in these negotiations with South Africa (BNA File H.306). It would, however, take three more years, until 1963, for Bechuanaland authorities to gain full control.

Revenue was also the driving force behind a new Bechuanaland government's proposal to set up its own commercial radio station in 1960. By that time it was estimated that at least 300 new listeners were taking out receiver licences annually. In 1960, the SABC received L2300 while the Protectorate received L283. The idea was quickly abandoned over 'insuperable objections' (Minute No. 9, 20 March 1960, BNA File H.306) from Pretoria. In their debates that year, the Protectorate European Advisory Council (EAC) voiced support for a government-run, non-commercial station in the territory, 'since no one wants to listen to SABC' and 'most people have no desire to be inflicted with the Afrikaans from SABC' (ibid.). In the north, around Francistown, most people were out of range and instead listened to Rhodesia/Central African Federation stations from Bulawayo or Salisbury (ibid.).

In October 1960, an information consultant from the BBC was hired. In January 1961, he issued a confidential report on the establishment of information services for Bechuanaland which included several relevant passages concerning the desirability of setting up a government radio station to supplement the SABC-managed ZNB-Mafikeng. ZNB was still reading SABC news bulletins, which arrived by landline from Johannesburg, and playing records from a library of 5 000 selections, also furnished by the SABC. Some in London went so far as to express fears to the High Commissioner that merely by sending a BBC expert, South African authorities might tighten their demands in negotiations over postal and other matters (confidential telegramme, Shannon to Maud, 20 April 1961 in BNA File H.306). With independence talks looming, all three resident commissioners expressed their frustration to London:

> We cannot afford to simply do nothing; we cannot concede that they (South Africa) have any right to dictate whether we should have broadcasting or not. We cannot rely

> on their output being adequate or suitable or friendly towards us. Broadcasting is our own affair. (confidential extract, 8–9 May 1961, in BNA File H.306)

By July, London had changed its policy. Resident commissioners were instructed to prepare legislation substituting themselves for the South African Postmaster as the broadcasting authority in each territory. This was done for Bechuanaland, putting control of broadcasting in the hands of the Controller of Posts, who was subject to the British High Commissioner. When he resumed talks with South Africa in July over postal control, the commissioner argued for the first time that given the changed political conditions in the region (although not specifically mentioning South Africa's exit from the Commonwealth), each territorial administration must be free to exercise its own control over radio (confidential transcript, 20 July 1961, in BNA H.306).

The decision to allow Bechuanaland to move ahead with a government radio service had been made. Important questions remained around commercials, as well as the specific form of government control over such a venture. Fawcus and the other commissioners had at last brought the issue of political sovereignty to the surface. Henceforth, it would no longer be possible to blame Pretoria for broadcast policy and development – it now rested squarely with British authorities in each territory.

Faced with a range of perceived political, ideological and economic pressures arising in the wake of the decision to grant Botswana independence, rapid, centralised broadcast development became a priority, particularly as those entrusted with designing policy and developing the service came to see its value as 'an essential official government mouthpiece to answer hostile propaganda from African nationalist and communist radio services,' in the words of Major Alan Donald, newly appointed Bechuanaland Information Officer (BNA File H.306, Minute No. 15, 1 March 1962).

Donald, with the backing of the Resident Commissioner, now sought to sever links with the SABC via ZNB-Mafikeng and create a new service located inside the borders of a future independent Botswana. In addition, he advocated for broadcasting government-produced programmes of local news and information in English and Setswana, explaining policy and providing musical features to Protectorate listeners. BBC news bulletins would replace those of the SABC. Transmitters would not beam signals outside of Bechuanaland and would not interfere with stations in South Africa. It was also recommended by Donald and approved by the government that Bechuanaland had no intention of establishing or allowing a commercial venture to compete with Springbok Radio, with a powerful signal and Setswana coverage of much of southern Bechuanaland (confidential minute, 24 August 1962, BNA File H.306).

By this time, news of the Bechuanaland Radio pilot project had reached South Africans. Reporters from major newspapers, including the *Star*, investigated.

Donald held administrative responsibility through a new information branch of the government secretariat. In September 1962, Colonial Welfare and Development Grant No.7083, providing L400 for the purchase of two shortwave receivers to relay BBC news bulletins, was announced (Savingram, 'Broadcasting' in BNA H.306). In October, as final preparations for the pilot project (to be located in Lobatse) got underway, pressure on South Africa to relinquish licensing authority to the Protectorate, was stepped up (confidential minute, 24 October 1962).

At this point, with Colonial Office support and active BBC involvement with Bechuanaland radio, the High Commissioner took a hard line with South Africa, informing them that 'regardless of [South African] cooperation, radio would proceed' (confidential, Savingram, 18 October 1962). Authorities in South Africa kept negotiations over frequency allocations in stalemate well into 1963, before agreeing to what had already been determined by use (memo, Donald, 1 August 1963, in BNA H.306).

Conclusion

With the commencement of the Bechuanaland Radio pilot project the idea of a private commercial service in Bechuanaland rapidly faded, although periodic business proposals continued to be received even post-independence in September 1966. For the British, it was easier to put the issue of Bechuanaland radio before the South African authorities once it became clear that independence was coming, that Botswana would emerge as a member of the Commonwealth under a moderate, non-racialist leadership, and that control of radio would remain firmly in the hands of government, with due deference to South African concerns.

Even after their commitment to Botswana independence, British policy in several crucial sovereignty areas (including radio and extending into postal, currency, customs duties, telegraphic and telephonic communications) was still based on a measure of reluctant deference to Pretoria. As British power and political will in southern Africa faded, a corresponding rise to domination by South Africa (at least in some policy areas) seemed acceptable, as long as British interests in trade and foreign policy matters remained unchallenged. Until the last, lines of influence or control remained largely as they had been drawn decades earlier, based on power or prior right of occupancy. The losers, of course, were the citizens of Botswana, whose leaders would have to bargain and press for their rightful sovereignty in the face of not one but two colonial masters, less visible but not gone.

The process of localising broadcasting and telecommunications was by no means complete by independence. For decades, even after majority rule to some extent, many Botswana media and communications policies and systems continued to reflect – even sustain – the unbalanced economic and political relationship between the two countries, and the unyielding policy norm of state control of broadcasting,

surviving as unwelcome remnants of South African and British imperialisms, etched into neocolonial dependency relationships.

Commercial radio service, and eventually even television, did come to Botswana. Policy debates leading up to them continued to reflect South African influence, be it in the form of stronger signals, FM service, more music, or in the impact of commercials and advertising revenue concerns. Looking back over the decades, it is still worth pondering today whether things would have turned out any better if radio had been born commercial on Botswanan soil.

References

African Advisory Council, *Official record*, 18th session, Mafikeng, 4 March 1937.

African Advisory Council, *Official record*, 27th session, Mafikeng, 25 April–7 May 1946.

African Advisory Council, *Official record*, 29th session, Mafikeng, August 1948.

Armour, C. 1984. The BBC and development of broadcasting in British colonial Africa. *African Affairs* 83(332) (July): 359–402.

Bechuanaland Protectorate Radio Proclamation No. 1 of 1927.

Botswana National Archives (hereafter BNA):

BNA File S.224/5/1, 'Bechuanaland Radio' (1927–1942)

BNA File H.306, High Commission file

BNA File, 6748/13, Bechuanaland Secretariat file

BNA File 6748/23, 'Wireless communication in the Bechuanaland Protectorate' (1939–1945)

BNA File 6748/23/II, 'Wireless communication in the Bechuanaland Protectorate' (1946–1959)

BNA File S.371/2/1, 'Information policy'

BNA File 7241/5, 'Bechuanaland Protectorate five-year development plans' (1944)

BNA File 7241/II, 'Proposals for post-war development of communication' (1941–1943)

BNA File 1188/II, 'Wireless communication in the Bechuanaland Protectorate' (1934–1936)

Clarke, A.C.1945. Memorandum. 13 September, BNA.

De Koning, T.L. 1981. Broadcasting in the Republic of South Africa. In *Broadcasting around the world*, ed. W.E. McCavitt, 9–24. Blue Ridge Summit, PA: Tab Books.

Development plans for Bechuanaland. 1944. The *Star* (Johannesburg), 22 July.

Franklin, H. 1949. *Report on development of broadcasting to Africans in Central Africa.* Lusaka: Government Printer.

Gadsen, F. 1986. Wartime propaganda in Kenya. *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 19(3): 401–420.

Great Britain, *Colonial Office Report No. 186*.

Halpern, J. 1965. *South Africa's hostages: Basutoland, Bechuanaland and Swaziland.* Baltimore, NJ: Penguin.

Hyam, R. 1972. *The failure of South African expansion, 1908–1948.* New York: Holmes and Meier.

Kittermaster, A.M. 1954. Northern Rhodesia listener research. *Community Development Bulletin* 5(2).

Kucera, G. 1968. Broadcasting in Africa: a study of Belgian, British and French colonial policies. Unpublished PhD dissertation, Michigan State University.

Orlick, P. 1969. South African radio. *Educational Broadcasting Review* 3(4): 36–44.

Spence, J.E. 1964. British policy towards the High Commission territories. *Journal of Modern African Studies* 2(2): 221–247.

Wilkinson, J.F. 1972. The BBC and Africa. *African Affairs* 71(283): 176–185.

Williams, J.G. 1951. Broadcasting in the African colonies. *BBC Quarterly* 6(4): 216–221.

Zaffiro, J. 1987. A history of radio in Bechuanaland, 1927–1954. Unpublished manuscript. Gaborone: National Institute of Research.

Zaffiro, J. 1989. Twin births: African nationalism and government information policy in the Bechuanaland Protectorate, 1957–1966. *International Journal of African Historical Studies* 22(1): 51–77.